



Testimony of Cheri Quickmire

Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut

Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

January 28, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Jutila and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 36 state chapters. We have approximately 7500 members and activists in Connecticut.

I am here today to testify in favor of House Joint Resolution 16 approving an amendment to the state constitution to grant increased authority to the General Assembly regarding Election Administration and in favor of House Bill 5600, AAC The Registrars of Voters.

Voting is our civic duty and it is something we do to show our country and our children that we are proud to be American. Common Cause works here and around the country to ensure that every voter has the opportunity to cast their vote and that every vote counts as cast. We work to prevent voter intimidation and to prevent the threats posed by groups that challenge and confront other Americans as they go to the polls. We believe that clear rules will help ensure that eligible Americans can exercise their civic responsibility to vote.

The basic question answered here is Where Will You be on Election Day? We know that you will be at your polling place, casting your ballot. Or, if you know far enough in advance you are going to be traveling, you will request an absentee ballot ahead of time. But what if you get the flu? What if another "super storm" hits your community? What if going to the polls just is not convenient for you in the time allotted?

HJ Resolution 16 would grant the Connecticut General Assembly the ability to pass laws to enable persons to vote who do not appear in person at a polling place on Election Day. Currently how someone can vote if they do not appear at their polling place on Election Day is written into the state Constitution, which does not allow for early voting and places restrictions on absentee ballots. Changing any of these provisions, including adding a “caregiver provision” to the list of eligible terms for an absentee ballot, requires passing a constitutional amendment. HJ Resolution 16 would allow the General Assembly to address these issues in the future.

Nationwide it is estimated that more than 32 million American voters cast their ballots early before Election Day — nearly one quarter of the entire electorate. More than 30 states allow citizens to cast ballots early through regional early voting centers or no-excuse absentee ballots that voters can obtain without having to state a reason. All over this country in red and blue states, voters have the opportunity to vote early. Voters like options and we believe that it is time for Connecticut voters to have this option. This resolution will give the General Assembly the power to set policy on these issues in the future should you decide to address them and to modernize our election laws as new technologies and methods emerge.

HB 5600 AAC The Registrars of Voters includes critical provisions that will modernize Connecticut’s election procedures and ensure that Registrars have access to the internet and are able to communicate with the Secretary of the State electronically. The proposed bill also deals with questions about accountability of elected officials whose offices are independent and reliant on the municipalities for support but, apparently not oversight. We support a strong role for the Secretary of the State and the State Elections Enforcement Commission in election oversight. And we would suggest including in Sec. (b) the word regulations to make it conform to Sec. (a).

In addition, we strongly support the posting of requirements for identification at each polling place – somewhere prominent and easily viewed by voters. Common Cause poll stood in various locations around the state on election day and heard considerable misinformation about voter identification. This is critical information for young and elderly voters who may be worried about having appropriate identification.

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